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STATE FOR EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP, OES/PCI--SALZBERG AND BLAINE
BANGKOK FOR REO-JIM WALLER
STATE PLEASE PASS TO USAID FOR MILLER AND DEELY

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SUBJECT: CAMBODIA INDOOR AIR POLLUTION ASSESSMENT

REF: 06 STATE 192919

¶1. SUMMARY: While some NGOs, most notably the Cambodia Rural Development Team (CRDT), are promoting the use of technology to reduce indoor air pollution, there is little awareness or government commitment to addressing IAP in Cambodia. END SUMMARY.

IAP a Low Priority for Cambodian Government

¶2. Mr. Heng Nareth, Director of the Department of Environmental Pollution Control, said that indoor air pollution is an idea of developed countries to take care of the health of their peoples and is not a priority in Cambodia. Cambodians need to have enough to eat first before thinking of anything else, he added. According to Mr. Nareth, Cambodia is not a member of the Partnership for Clean Indoor Air (PCIA), but is a member of the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities based in Manila. Cambodia is also a signatory to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution in 2002. However, IAP has not been incorporated into the national development strategy, nor has funding been set aside for IAP in Cambodia.

¶3. The Ministry of Environment, and its Department of Environmental Pollution Control, is responsible for both outdoor and indoor pollution control. The Department submitted a funding proposal to the Council of Ministers in 2004 for work in three priority areas: waste management, waste water treatment, and an inventory of air pollution, but the funding proposal was not approved.

WHO to Create Pollution Project

¶4. The World Health Organization (WHO) recently funded an environmental health project which focuses mainly on health and medical waste management. The project, led by the Ministry of Health, involved many concerned government institutions. In the near future, WHO will propose an indoor air management project aimed at building technical capacity including measuring and analyzing indoor air quality. Dr. Nasir Hassan, WHO Environmental Engineer, said while he was not sure about the seriousness of indoor air pollution in urban areas, it might be serious in rural areas as households are using inefficient fuels such as firewood, charcoal, twigs and rice husk.

Local NGOs Involved in Improving Indoor Air Pollution

¶5. Cambodian women burn biomass--mostly wood in rural areas and charcoal in urban centers--for daily cooking in their kitchens. The use of inefficient traditional stoves consumes more fuel, resulting in frequent movements to forest for fuel collection. In order to cope with this issue, some local NGOs are working on improving a cooking system by using a more modern and environmentally friendly method, such as improved cookstoves and biodigesters, which

mitigates and improves indoor air pollution.

16. The Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT) was formed in 2001 to undertake development projects to improve the living standards of subsistence communities in rural Cambodia. Biological Gas Digesters (biodigesters) are part of the CRDT's rural development project package. The biodigesters eliminate the requirement for traditional carbon fuels such as firewood and charcoal. The biodigesters accumulate and direct naturally emitted methane gas from animal manure and vegetable waste to be used safely as cooking fuel. Its major purposes are to reduce local deforestation, environmental pollution and living costs, and increase living standards of local communities. The residual waste produced from the biodigester may then be used as natural fertilizer to increase rice yield. Since 2001 CRDT has installed more than 50 biodigesters for villagers in the provinces of Kampong Cham, Kratie, Kampong Speu, Prey Veng, Stung Treng, Takeo and Kandal.

17. The Cambodian Fuelwood Saving Project (CFSP) has developed and promoted improved cookstoves since 2000 thanks to their wood energy savings and environmental protection. According to statistics taken from CFSP website, so far 120,000 improved cookstoves have been in use across Cambodia.

Local Health Effects of IAP

18. According to a recent study on the role of gender in household energy and indoor air pollution in Cambodia co-authored by San You and K.M. Sulpya, Cambodian women suffer from emissions during cooking which can increase rates of respiratory diseases, including Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI), Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (COLD), premature birth, reduced oxygen to body tissues, eye infection and headache. The situation is further aggravated by the low awareness.